

Mr Olli Rehn

EU Commissioner for Enlargement

Future Agreement on Kosovo – Declaration by the Commission

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

European Parliament, Strasbourg

11 July 2007

President, Honourable Members,

Kosovo's future status is the last remaining status issue resulting from the break-up of Yugoslavia. It is vital to get movement in the UN Security Council at this stage. The Security Council members need to carry their responsibility for resolving Kosovo's status and set up a multilateral framework, giving the whole region a sustainable outcome.

I call on Serbia to play a constructive role in the next phase of the process. I call on all the actors involved not to pursue unilateral actions – whether declarations or veto threats – which would only harm the interest of us all in a stable region that can become fully part of the EU over time.

In March, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on Kosovo. In my view our institutions share much common ground. You took the view that the only sustainable settlement is one that respects all communities, helps Kosovo's economic recovery and provides an international presence to safeguard the interests of all ethnic communities.

In June, the Council confirmed the EU's support to UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari and his comprehensive proposal as the basis for the settlement of Kosovo's status and a new UN Security Council resolution.

We support the proposal as the best possible and available compromise that can ensure that all communities have a future in a Kosovo where democracy and the rule of law can take a firm hold.

The key elements of this proposal are the building blocks of any modern society. They include the protection of the rights of communities and of cultural and religious heritage, and basic constitutional and security provisions. All these are vital for a democratic and multi-ethnic Kosovo that can also have a functioning and sustainable economy.

International supervision – covering both political and security issues – will be necessary for some time in Kosovo. Its purpose must be clear: to supervise the implementation of a status settlement that ensures the rights of all communities and the sustainable development of Kosovo.

In a nutshell, we must do three things now: first, to settle Kosovo's status without unnecessary delay; second, to preserve the essence of the current settlement proposal; and third, to further support Kosovo's European aspirations and progress towards the European Union.

As Commissioner, I have already opened up several instruments under the Stabilisation and Association Process. The Commission engages in a regular dialogue on reforms, we provide generous assistance, we monitor progress on the basis of European partnership, and we have opened up regional cooperation activities to Kosovo.

Delaying the process for delay's sake is a potentially dangerous exercise. It can hardly merge the diametrically opposed positions. But it could increase the risk of instability on the ground.

Hence, we must show the Kosovans that there is movement and that there will be a solution. We must not allow the hard-liners to gain the upper hand. The Balkans and Europe would suffer the consequences.

Kosovo is a profoundly European matter. We have much at stake to achieve a sustainable settlement – as you said in your March resolution, "finding a solution on the basis of Mr Ahtisaari's proposal is of greatest importance for the stability and further development on the entire region; ... both Serbia and Kosovo are due to become part of the EU, like their neighbours, since the future of the Western Balkans lies in the EU".

Indeed, neither Russia nor the United States is so directly affected by what happens in the Balkans as we Europeans are. It is Europe that would pay the price, if the status process failed. Kosovo's status should not be settled by unilateral declarations or unilateral veto threats, but by effective and responsible multilateralism. A sustainable settlement is indeed best achieved by a managed and multilateral process.

Let me close by reiterating that delaying the status process for delay's sake will get us nowhere. It would only risk instability in Kosovo, prolong the agony in Serbia, and delay the region's movement towards the EU.

This is the moment when Europe – both the EU and its member states – must show leadership and help bring a sustainable solution to Kosovo.

We owe it to Kosovo, we owe it to the Balkans, and we owe it to Europe.